JFK Facts Podcast 7 - Rex Bradford - 19 July, 2021

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I)

Uploaded by Assassination Archives and Research Center (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTkqmYSbj62SYnZbivuZrXw) on Thu Aug 19 2021.

JFK Facts Podcast

Courtesy of the founder and editor of JFK Facts, Jefferson Morley, today we offer a special program with a special guest to discuss the current status of JFK assassination related documents.

Rex Bradford is the founder of History-Matters.com He is an essayist and lecturer, Vice-President of the Assassination Archives and Research Center, is responsible for several document collections. He is a consultant, analyst, electronic archivist and president of the Mary Ferrell Foundation, and he has done more than any other individual to facilitate online public access to a digital archive of assassination-related records.

https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/State_of_JFK_Releases_2021.html

https://www.maryferrell.org/php/withheld2021.php

https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/2017_Document_Releases.html

https://jfkfacts.org/

00:00:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I)

[Music] welcome to jfk facts podcast which features news analysis and discussion of issues relevant to the study of president kennedy's assassination my name is alan dale courtesy of the founder and editor of jfk facts jefferson morley today we offer a special program and a very special guest rex bradford is the founder of historyhyphenmatters.com he is an essayist and lecturer vice president of the assassination archives and research center he's responsible for document collections is a consultant an analyst electronic archivist and president of the mary farrell foundation and he has done more than any other individual to facilitate online public access to a digital archive of assassination related records he's the author of invaluable essays available at mary farrell the 14-minute gap whispers from the silent generation i'm very happy to introduce rex bradford to jfk facts thank you for being with us thanks alan great to talk to you again my pleasure i know we are here ostensibly to discuss the slightly more than half a dozen releases seven releases between july of 2017 and april of 2018 and why it is that the year 2021 is an important records year but before we get to that i'm reminded that we spoke recently about your introduction to the jfk world and the fact that something

00:02:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=120s)

world and the fact that something had to happen during the 1990s which resulted in focusing your attention on these uh related complexities which are the subject of all of these materials all the documents all the files that take up so much of the attention of people like us uh can you remind me a little bit about that process or i don't know it's uh everybody gets into this stuff falls down the rabbit hole however we want to say it in a different way i know we talked about this recently my entree was late 1990s i'm a comer compared to a lot of people that i work with and talk to um i had never seen the jfk movie when it came out in 1992 had never paid attention before then either i was a modest student of history sort of but not very in-depth in any area and uh jfk movie oliver stone's movie came on the tv while i was reading one of my programming books and seemed kind of interesting i kind of half watched it and then next time i was in a bookstore i picked up a book and i said to myself after reading the book if a third of this is true this is unbelievable spot on yeah and another book another book another book and then i uh found out there are these conferences happening in dallas and went out i think in 1998 um to attend two of them um at that point coppa was still doing theirs and jfk lancer had theirs and at that point the document releases from as a result of the jfk records act were in full swing and people are passing around vimeos and got photocopies of all these documents and being a computer guy i kept saying have you people not heard of the internet and uh that was my realization that i should uh become the

00:04:01 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=241s)

that i should uh become the electronic archivist of these records because it seemed like such an amazing big deal and i lucked into the fact that a person i met at one of the conferences introduced me excuse me to jim lazar who runs the assassin hr he's in research center which probably has the largest certainly has the largest paper collection of these records outside the national archives and so we developed a partnership and uh i started doing cd-roms that actually first with him as well as the history matters website and later on that rolled into the mirifrail foundation and um you know continuing work doing this the meredith foundation is about 15 years old at this point um and we're still at it and this is as we'll talk in this podcast another big year for this sort of material it is indeed uh we might remind our listeners that jim lazar president of the assassination archives research research centers certainly uh distinguished perhaps our nation's leading freedom of information act attorney and it has been his labor over a period of god only knows how many decades prior to 1992 that litigating on behalf of people like um harold weisberg and many others to try to allow us to access right i got my start at history matters doing things like chop the bindings off of the 26 volumes of warren commission reports and scanning them at three o'clock in the morning for quite a while um and other you know house committee reports and things like that but sort of the you know some of the big jump starting of the larger universe of these records that researchers and writers are using to

00:06:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=360s)

researchers and writers are using to this day um came from collections from aarc including for instance a person named mark allen sued the fbi and cia and a couple other agencies after the house committee folded up shop for public access to the records that that committee had seen which were not public and that lawsuit went on for something like 17 years and around the time that those very records were being declassified and put into the national archives in essence the agencies settled those lawsuits and um trucks of boxes showed up at the aarc's offices in dc that's right and subsequently a few years later i personally drove a few rider trucks up to massachusetts where i live and uh that was sort of a big uh a big infusion of sort of raw fbi and cia records into to accompany the reports and volumes and that sort of thing well i'd forgotten that the mark allen uh litigation was drawn out that many years that's even longer a little longer than what jeff morley has just survived at least 13 14 15 years in the george joe and edie's materials yep thank god with unfortunately not as voluminous an outcome of uh material yeah sad and true um we refer so frequently to the 1992 president john f kennedy assassination records collection act made effective because of congress voting it into law effective october 26 1992 uh 25-year i guess proviso or sunset defining parameter so that october 26 of 2017 was supposed to be the point at which all of

00:08:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=480s)

supposed to be the point at which all of the documents which had been determined to be relating to the assassination of the president would be released in full that didn't happen instead we got a succession seven consecutive releases between uh july 24 2017 april 26 2018 and then the news that a decision in part i guess is the consequence of the president of the united states deferring to whatever request was made of him to do so that the remaining materials would be withheld for another three years and that october 26 of 2021 this very year would be the next deadline right right yeah so the dates this year are april 26 which has already passed which was when the various agencies holding the remaining withheld records um would have to give nations to the chief archivist united states and i actually don't know what happened with that that's something that i know some people are trying to find out the state of affairs what those recommendations were then i'm sure the recommendations are not public at this point um and then september 26th is when the chief archivist has to make his recommendation to president joe biden and then by law joe biden has to make a decision about the fate of those records what happened last time around was as you mentioned the jfk records act had a clause in it saying 25 years after the passage of the act any records which would remain either withheld in full or even had redaction yeah would be released in full absent a determination by the president united states which was supposed to be accompanied by a detailed review of each record explaining why each record was not withheld and this thing was kind of a shortcut i mean they did

00:10:01 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=601s)

mean they did there were certainly in 2017 and early 2018 quite a number of records that were released some of which formerly was held in full a couple thousand of those and then many more with redactions lifted but um according to the archives itself there's nearly 16 000 records which remain with redactions um and it's a it's a little bit of a murky matter what remains withheld in full um but uh that's what's at say stakes or this year that's what got that's the the cans that got kicked down the road yeah and those the the 2018 april 2018 memorandum from the trump administration declared that you know at this time in 2021 a redetermination be made and supposedly the same rules apply about needing the president's signature and reasons for the redactions to continue and so we shall see we will indeed uh you know i could tell you an interesting thing that i that came from our dear colleague uh malcolm blunt and they're actually two quick things i'll share with you one pertains to the late great paleo anthropologist or paleontologist evolutionary biologist stephen j gould who was a you know popular science writer and reasonable person and he wrote about the burgess shale and explained in relatively simple language that evolutionary leaps are not necessarily as direct as when one might assume if somebody is not educated in biology and all of the necessary sciences um that sometimes things seem to go kind of sideways and the reason that i'm referring to that is because malcolm pointed out that materials that he had

00:12:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=720s)

he had acquired legally in the 1990s and early 2000s things that were released as the result of the work of the assassination records review board which had the responsibility of first defining what does it mean for a federal agency to be holding something that is judged to be assassination related and second to to assess and release as much of that material as could be done legally and reasonably so that was what the arr b did the result of which as you know was a whole hell of a lot of paper got released to people like us go ahead no no i well i was just going to say that some of the stuff that malcolm uh acquired during that early period has been re-released since july of 2017 during those seven successive re releases and the versions that he had released earlier are less redacted than things that have been presented to us i've heard that from a few people and i've seen a couple examples myself you know i think it's hard to know with specific cases how much to chalk up to the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing there's a lot of paper here and a lot of chaos an example of that chaos is some people may know that the national archives for several years kept online a database of the metadata of all the released records yes this is not the paper documents themselves this is title subjects number pages date of last review that sort of thing and several months ago that database was taken down and replaced with a spreadsheet which was purported to be the same data in excel spreadsheet form where you could just download it

00:14:01 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=841s)

where you could just download it and the very fair foundation we had had a person on our behalf scrape the contents of that archive off the narrow website and had our own copy it's called the jfk database explorer with a sort of front end browsing search engine that i wrote to try to make those record the metadata more accessible so i i kind of didn't pay too much attention to this until one day i said you know i should download that spreadsheet maybe they've updated the date of last review you know because the copy we had i was told by people that nara themselves had not been updated since 2008 so a few months ago i downloaded that spreadsheet and lo and behold it was literally half empty the number of records in it was about half of what it should be 90 of the cia records were missing all the church committee records were missing all the joint chiefs of staff records were missing and so i contacted the people in there and said you know this thing is not complete and i was assured that it wasn't need complete and then i pointed out examples of where it wasn't incomplete and then got a oh and it took another couple months and then finally uh last month they put up a new version in six parts and i downloaded those and put them all together and indeed now it seems to be uh correct in terms of it's got the exact correct record count as far as i can tell and the metadata includes date of last review of things like 2017 and 2018 so i'm still looking it over we're going to be doing an update of the jfk database explorer sometime in the next week or so with the new data um and i can't vouch for the whole thing i don't know how to even go about that but it appears to be a currently up to date database in terms of and that may give more definitive answer to which particular records are still redacted if that information is in fact up to date which i'm not sure of at this point but so you know that's an example of the

00:16:01 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=961s)

but so you know that's an example of the kind of stuff that it worries me actually um the state of affairs there and another example that is um there in the old version of the database and this may have changed now with the new version there were over 6 000 records marked with held in full which were not among the set marked for release in 2017 and i inquired uh martha murphy was running the collection at that point uh she isn't anymore and she told me oh those those records are all released there's just an out of date data and the old metadata from 2008 if all they're all on the shelves right and we did a spot check of that of about 40 records and found that over half of them were not in fact on the shelves and then to check that and so again there's a lot of chaos i don't want to attribute any sinister motives to this it's a huge collection but it's probably it's a problem yeah um and uh so i'm you know concerned about that and uh trying to work on ways in which we can get better information about this stuff and then and and particularly these new records uh as part of this um i have a page we put up on the merrick farrell foundation website about the current state of releases as known um which uh talks about the stuff we've talked about here about the you know number of records currently withheld and then it does a deep dive on the withheld in full records because those were supposedly all to be released uh according to nara back in 2017-2018 so the only reactions would remain and there's a number of ways in which that's not um and so it's a detailed value for people who are interested in getting into the weeds on this stuff well speaking of the weeds i mean you just referred to at least two out of three of pages that i intend to link to our conversation here um for which you are responsible people like bill simpage has

00:18:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1080s)

like bill simpage has contributed and these are really for people who will be curious about what is the current status we've got three pages that you for which you're responsible at maryfarrell.org one is the main one to which you refer state of the jfk releases 2021. there is the original 2017-2018 document releases and that includes uh you know basic overview of the chronology and where things theoretically were during that season of inquiry and then finally withheld in full the 2021 update and this was in response to freedom in information act request and that the spreadsheet to which you referred just a moment ago originally referred to 3598 withhead in full withheld in full records slated for declassification and in the subsequent releases 2017 and 2018 2447 of these were in fact released but 1 151 were not right yeah so that that page is a

companion to the state of the releases and it tries to explain where we're at with those with the withheld in full and to just summarize some of that so yeah i discovered that there was over a thousand documents that seemed seem to have fallen through the cracks and it's not quite that and i'll explain for instance um 520 of them are in fact known still withheld and for a couple of reasons the primary reason is that they are irs related records and in fact there's a carve out in the jfk records act that those would not be released for irs privacy reasons and the time there's hundreds and hundreds of those and then there's a small handful of so-called feed of gift uh documents and these are are really

00:20:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1200s)

uh documents and these are are really too bad because what they are the the bulk of them there's not that many are interviews that willie manchester the author conducted with robert kennedy and jackie kennedy yeah while writing the book death of a president and these records are withheld i think until 2067 under a deed of gift um and what given what we now know from work like david talbot's book brothers um it would be pretty interesting to see what they told manchester united um yeah uh and that so so that's part of it and then re they narrow discovered that some records were lost along the way some ford ford library records were lost so you know when it comes down to it it's much less than a thousand that are like um unaccounted for by me you know they're either known missing or known withheld um but there are but there are others that false from that and uh i'm sorry say that last part again the there but there are yet others that just seem to fall just seemed to have fallen through the cracks uh yeah the fidelity of your mic situation just changed sorry a moment okay yeah it's better yeah much better thank you okay um you know so that's the page that allows people to explore if they want to see for themselves what particular records we're talking about i divide them into about 11 different categories um and this is this is again the ones that uh remain withheld in full um or apparently do like there's some of them it's unclear actually and you're but and then like again the larger so so these i'm not even sure if these are even up for this 20 21 re-review because this is sort of my analysis and it's not apparently narrows data um they by their own admission and i can't even verify this number currently there are 15 834 i think is the number records with

00:22:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1320s)

834 i think is the number records with redactions in them um a lot of these are cia but they spread across other agencies as well and you know it's worth talking maybe about what this is all about you know in in some cases these are whether people refer to as sources and methods you know nicely an informant name or number it might be um a particular you know surveillance technique being discussed whatever and so there certainly is that sort of thing in the records and the agencies have tried to fight to keep those things from becoming public as you might expect there are other areas where there's entire pages and several pages in a row black that in some cases it looks like it's more embarrassment than sources and methods um you know there's uh there's still some dirty laundry in a lot of these records um it's sort of and it's a mixed bag and runs the gamut we don't know in many cases in fact what the what the precise information is and the reason for it my view has been i guess that after more than 50 years that there's very little i can imagine that's in these records that really uh matters uh uh as a matter of like public safety and that the reasons for public disclosure are in the fullest sense outweigh that yeah um others may differ on that um and maybe also worth pointing out in this conversation how much has already gone missing um you know the the narra acknowledged a bit more you know with missing rockefeller audio tapes and things like that from rockefeller commission audio tapes from the ford library but um there are big holes in what's already been released that will never be recovered the church committee is a prime example of that there are dozens upon dozens of interview transcripts that just disappeared the review board actually tried to chase this down

00:24:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1440s)

actually tried to chase this down and went in and themselves inspected every box of this stuff that um uh they're held by congress uh that you know that they could uh find and um and wrote and wrote a bit about it actually in their final report and then there's other in their files some of which are now have been that we put

online courtesy of malcolm blunt in fact yes including me into the story um we found out more of their story of trying of discovering how many church community records were missing and trying to find them unsuccessfully to say nothing of the historical review group inside the agency with which arrb was working uh making what is almost certainly a very sincere effort to locate volume 5 of lee oswald's security files five out of seven which simply went missing and then there was great you know consternation and discussion about well it was confusing because they were marked with roman numerals or maybe things got consolidated in a different way and then of course we find uh russell holmes work files where everything was documented that there were oh well betsy wolfe of the house select committee on an on assassinations hsca she had volume five and got partially through it and and that was a matter that is entered into the historical record i actually i put up i got you'll be thrilled i got malcolm to to write a uh an essay about you know what happened yeah and so i put it up on aarc i think i included it as an appendix in my malcolm book the devil's in the details but it simply is gone forever at least that's the way it is at the moment uh i've got one other thing from malcolm i i alluded earlier to two quick things um the first was you know his concern that materials for instance on an cia officer named joseph burkhalter smith

[00:26:01 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1561s)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1561s)

named joseph burkhalter smith he got stuff in late 90s early 2000s and that is less redacted than the same files that have been re-released uh since 2017 but he also told me about a component inside the agency which we've dealt with in the past this is a records control branch and that's related to you know the bureaucracy of the agency it doesn't have anything to do with covert you know operations it's just hr in in this case is headquarters regulations and something that he has brought to my attention which is that by law and who set this up maybe it goes all the way back to 1947 for all i know personnel files agency i'm telling you specifically about cia um as opposed to all the other agencies that are a part of these records that we're always referring to it's not all cia it's not all fbi there's a hell of a lot of other stuff from other places investigations themselves you know the house committee church committee boy i'll say those oh boy is that a wealth of invaluable stuff um malcolm has described to me that there is a rule that personnel files which i guess would include 201 files can be legally destroyed at 56 years how or why this seems like an odd numeral 56 years so you know by using all of my fingers and all of my toes i noted to malcolm that in 2017 at least in relation to 1963 it hadn't been 56 years and in 2018 it hadn't been 56 years but by 2019 it was 56 years since november 22 1963 so if we were looking at personnel

[00:28:02 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1682s)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1682s)

1963 so if we were looking at personnel files that were still active uh in at the time of the assassination and if this information is correct as i suspect it is in 2019 things that we don't have access to may have been legally if not properly uh i would say improperly but may have been destroyed routinely because 2019 forward is uh so it just raised an interesting question about whether that might have been a factor there's a cost to kicking the can down the road continually for you know her many costs to it and one of them is that yeah that the potential for routine destruction of records due to age um right the um you know you know uh oswald's uh army intelligence file was routinely destroyed in 1973 this is something that the house committee discovered and wrote about great um and you know there's so many uh we don't have time to get into particularly in the 1990s even more than the records released now there's so many bombshells or things that things that would have been truly bombshells had they come out around the time that they were first discovered by these agencies yes uh any you know even from simple things that are well known now like the fact that during the warren commission era the the the warren commission discussed an executive session um allegations brought to them that oswald was an fbi informant yeah and this was something that they struggled mightily with and unsuccessfully um they were scared to death of jager hoover and and it took harold weisberger you mentioned to sort of drag those executive sessions out of the warren commission years later and discover that after jacob hoover was dead for instance

[00:30:00 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1800s)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1800s)

dead for instance yes um something i wrote on one of the pages you mentioned there was something that i ran across in the records released in 2017 which is um the house committee uh testimony of a man named orest pina who is his opinion i'll say yeah testimony house committee was a state secret for what some 35 or more years or more right and uh and interestingly enough the date of last review on this 1993 which is before the review board came into existence so the question i have that i don't know the answer to is did the review board even review this and kind of amazing if they didn't because it's one of the house committee depositions just sitting there in the files you know um and if they did review it on what basis would they have withheld in full the testimony of a bar owner in new orleans and and if you read the thing it's 35 pages long and what you come away with and and his story you know has been well known he uh claimed that he was an informant to the fbi and he claimed that he knew that oswald was as well yes so i'm in the company of all kinds was there uh both of their handlers that's right and so forth but if you read the testimony that sat there until 2017 on available the public what you find out is that he named names in that deposition he said oh you want to check out my story go talk to this restaurant over here and go talk to these guys and then there's a couple guys in customs uh in new orleans you should talk to and you know in 2017 it's a bit late at this point for these guys yeah and and so this is this is you know the kicking the can down the road it it it has a purpose um i ran across a cia memo i can't remember the exact details but it was it was written around 1995

[00:32:04 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1924s)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=1924s)

but it was it was written around 1995 and it was discussing internally the issue of the sunset clause that we've been talking about in the jfk records act that come 2017 these things are all supposed to be released in foe and the author of the memo discussed that this this would really be an opportunity to revisit whether they should really be released or not and basically you know hinting in the memo that well we will kick the cam further down the road when that time comes don't worry yeah so i believe it well you know and on that happy note more of the same i'm grateful to you for this and for so much more uh you know on on so many different levels and for such an ex an important uh period of our efforts to examine things which theoretically uh and theoret theoretically it's it's our right as citizens to have access to our own history without it being [Music] emulsified it's even the law of the land right yeah it passed unanimously how often has that ever happened thanks to oliver stone really no matter what else anyone might have to say about mr stone uh who is in the news again once again thank god because he's decided to come back to the story a new documentary i'm curious to see and uh and the people that have been on this case uh deserve credit as well in fact i know for a fact that um jim lazar who we mentioned and mark allen who we mentioned were both involved in the effort to put the trailer into the movie yeah that gave people who saw the movie an action item to call their congressman that's right all these russians did in huge numbers and that's you know

[00:34:02 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=2042s)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHKp9mCdq-I&t=2042s)

did in huge numbers and that's you know that's how we end up with the assassination records review board in the release of all of this stuff um thank you very much rex i'm grateful to you and i know we will continue to speak throughout the course of the year because there will be news one way or the other possibly something in between you know little nuance here and there good news and bad news wouldn't surprise me in the least well it's been a pleasure to talk to you and happy to do it again grateful to you always uh we'd like to thank you all for listening we invite you to join us at jfkfax.org where you will find updates on jfk related news with the goal of dispelling confusion and establishing an accurate record of the jfk story thank you for being with us [Music] done [Music] you

---

END